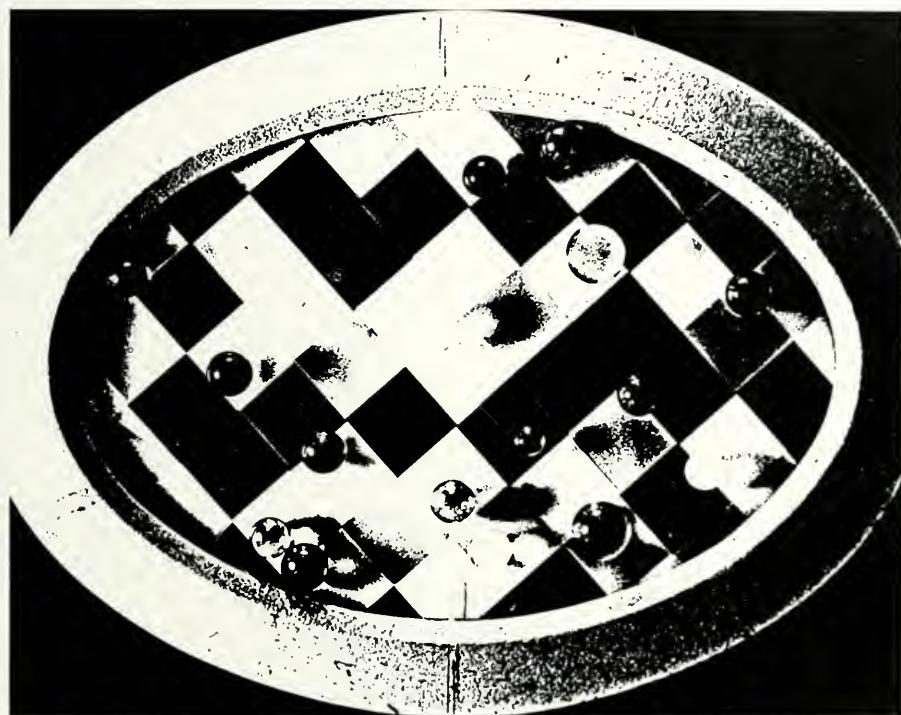


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I Want the Jungle

Joel Clark

I want trash in the streets
broken sewer lines
a shack for a home
an alcoholic mother
the open air market
playing children
wrinkled faces smiling
battered hands shelling oysters
rats, flies
organic smells
bb's through my windows
drunken behavior in our youth
sexual promiscuity
angry minorities shouting vulgarities
rednecks in pick-ups
hotrodding
disrupting my silence.

I want the jungle
unbearable heat
screaming monkeys
a snake under every stone
soupy water teeming, seething
swimming larvae
life everywhere
killing, giving
birthing, loving.

Don't hire me to keep your lawn mowed and sprinkler fixed.

No manicured campus or
brick home,
air conditioning, soft bed,
no cold Root Beer or Iced Tea with spearmint,
just lukewarm water, Thank You
and the barn.

The Lonesome Death of Gus Farace

Myja Thibault

About, I have composed this song,
My mobster-idol; hero long
Who shunned the right, embraced the wrong--
I speak of Gus Farace.
Ole Gus, he was a fearsome bloke;
Pumped-up on steroids, high on coke;
Caused Everett Hatcher (a Fed) to croak
--That did it, Gus Farace.
A hundred agents chased him hence
Down darkened street, and over fence
And even Gotti ordered all his "gents"
To hunt down Gus Farace.
One day, from hiding Gus did spring
With pal Sclafani, t'whom he did cling.
This man, he did his best to bring
To safety Gus Farace.
But Gotti's men, they got him first,
One fateful night in Bensonhurst.
An Uzi brought with a single burst
... The end of Gus Farace.

Porkbone Ugly

Cate Hamilton

Your ugly face gives me chills
(pseudo-masochistic thrills);
I cringe inside at your lack of grace:
I want to smash your leering face.
You're a dog but I'm not your bone
to grasp and chew and slurp and moan.
How many times do I have to say,
"Take your paws off me and go away?"
I loathe your pathetic green pond scum face;
I'll not be caught so stop your chase.
Quit breathing hard like some dog in heat--
to get lost quick is why God gave you feet!

A Poem for My Daddy

Andrea Hoover

My father's arms, they lifted me
Through the air to his broad,
Safe shoulders near the closest nest;
And then he sided 'round the flower-bed
'Til my wandering eyes saw the
Tufts of down and my monkey hands
Tugged at his collar saying,
"Stop, I can see them now. . . ."

And then he stood, my father,
Straight and strong, reaching high
To brush Kaloonga shoots from my face
So that I could see.
Soon, when I saw them—and was sure he
Was not looking—I touched their
Baby skin, shiny in the shredded
Sunlight, knowing full-well
The consequences.

They turned their blank eyes to
The sky in terror; cartilaged beaks
As wide as cracks in dry season's earth.
I followed their blind gaze up through
The jungled branches and froze,
Hoping the two Yellow Weavers
Flying in nervous circles above us
Had not seen me.

My size-four flip-flops dangled high
Above the violets we'd been so
Careful not to step on, my father
And I, and then they fell, first
The left and then the right.

Birds forgotten, I gave our signal
That my flight was over and like a
Crane he took me from my perch and
Lowered me to a safe landing,
So that I might retrieve
My second soles.

After lunch I lay under the thorn tree
Avoiding wide, darkened spikes while
wiping

Dust and manti from its silver leaves;
Always hoping to find new friends and
Playmates in the process.

Soon, I found two double-toed lizards
With roaming eyes that would not
synchronize.
Then, then pulled from our play
By two birds squawking the noise of ten,
I looked across the way and watched on in
Horror as the yellow chests took turns
Dive-bombing their nest, weaving in
And out of the tangled mess of
Branches like frenzied mongeese.

I ran, I screamed, I waved my arms,
And flung my flip-flops, for I knew—
I had seen them do it before.

Stumbling under the cold shade of
The kaloonga, I fell, and under my knees
Their bruised, broken bodies squashed and
oozed
Like tubes of warm, sticky ointment.
Then shifting to a squat,
I tried with hurried fingers to
Coax back the eyes that had leaked
From their sockets.

My father came with a spade and
Let me dig right there in my
Mother's garden.

He watched from behind as I struggled
And could make only a crack in the dark,
Wet ground.
When I was done, I laid the shovel
At his feet, then softly lined
The hole with blades of crabgrass
And lowered the babies,
Lifeless, into it.

Then, when he nodded, I took from my neck
The serpent mirror I had never gone
without,
And placed it on their crumpled bodies
As he spread the earth back over them,

Soft as icing.

The next several days were on my part spent
In hot pursuit of the yellow chests that circled, still,
The quiet grave site.

Soon, the slingshot my father'd made
One winter past was burning a hole in my
Back pants' pocket, and I could resist no
Longer the temptation to fire.

And so I did, until first one and then
The other fell, their flights over.
Down, down, through the tree's arms
They crashed, wings tearing, beaks shrieking,
Until with a dull thud they landed,
Bodies twitching, on top of my mother's
Trampled violets.

Pollen Painting CoryAnne Harrigan

The window screen filters
yellow pollen,
catches the dust
between squares in its grid.
Patterns like flowers in a Monet garden,
arbitrary as frost,
purposeful as finger painting
the five-year-old smears
for his mother's
refrigerator collection.

Overalls
Joely Snow

My great grandfather wears
straw hats
Big Ben overalls
he dips snuff in old coffee cans
I saw him for the first time
in many years
a new pair of overalls
he had on
he seems not as tall as I once imagined
when he held me up to the trees
to pick a green apple and hunt for worms
When he sings he slaps his knees
and taps his heavily
booted feet
the legs of his overalls rolled up
twice
his boot laces peeking at me
from below
He whistles while he plows the garden
lets me get him for dinner by
blowing the duck call
His hollow cheeks only whisper
of the memories he has
of me
Don't cry
he said
though I was sure I didn't sniffle
how would he know of my tears
when he cannot see his own hand
held up to his face?
He still rubs his forehead
playing wrinkle tag
when he is deep in thought
Perhaps he wonders where the years
have gone
When I was young and
ponytails
tickled his nose when I kissed him
goodnight.

Silent Sisters
Ellen McCrary

Silent sisters, come forth with your stories
Of weaving, farming and baking.
Tell of your thoughts usually kept silent
About inventions, politics and religion.
Bring forth your creative efforts
In recipes, baskets, textiles and paintings.
Lament for the lessons learned from women
Outside of the expected and demanded.
Give the people their legacy
Of your lives, accomplishments and history.

Wanda
Traci Wood

Wanda is dark...
he eyes, huge and bright, roll
back into her creased brow
as she tells me
about the men
who want her,
about the sunglasses
that never, never
fit her face ("like
everybody got a
huge head," she says,
"like everybody wear a
large blouse..."),
her tapered fingers dragging
on a candy-flavored
menthol cigarette to make
her life
a little bit sweeter.

El Salvador

Jody Hobbs

"Several times I have decided to leave. I almost could except for the children, the poor bruised victims of adult lunacy. Who would care for them? Whose heart would be so hard as to favor the reasonable thing in a sea of their tears and helplessness? Not mine, dear friend, not mine."

-Jean Donovan, a lay missioner who was murdered in El Salvador in 1980.

The last picture I got from Trixie came in the mail two weeks before she was killed. In the picture she wears a pink cotton sundress and a wide straw hat. She holds the tiny dark hand of a boy about five years old, straight black hair, round brown eyes, and his tummy poking out over his shorts from malnourishment.

The boy in the picture, Trixie told me in her letter, is Manuel. Both of his parents are either dead or missing, no one in their village is sure which. He and his sister lived in their hut, afraid to come out, for two weeks, starving, before two nuns Trixie worked with found them one afternoon when they paid a visit to a sick woman in the same mountain village.

Trixie said in her letter that the gunfire was everywhere in the hills, sometimes in her village. She said she wouldn't be surprised if the gunfire soon found her. All the people who are kind to the poor wind up in unmarked graves around here, Trixie said.

I don't know if she even got my response to her letter. I found myself begging her to come home. Of course, everyone else begged her to come home; they'd been begging her ever since she left. I think I was the only one who knew she'd never listen to us.

Long before El Salvador, I knew Trixie had been one of those people who decided for herself what was valuable, who might disappear at any moment to tend to her latest fascination. When we were seniors in high school,

Trixie wore a tuxedo to our senior prom. She sat in our English class and played her guitar for the whole class instead of giving the oral report that was supposed to accompany her research paper. She skipped school one day to catch a matinee of *Gone With the Wind* on the big screen. She'd only seen it on television before.

We went to different colleges, but every letter I received from Trixie was full of her same old-style antics: she climbed to the top of a fire tower with about ten of her friends and watched the tiny headlights of cars snake through the trees until sunrise, when everyone realized how high in the air they were; she and some of her friends were wandering around Washington, D.C., when a limousine drove up beside them and the people inside invited her to their party. The man that had invited them wrote to Trixie for two years after that, offering to fly her to visit him in Barbados in his private jet. She said he was boring. And when Trixie graduated from graduate school and got a job at an accounting firm in our hometown, I was not surprised to see her walk into my apartment wearing a sleek new business suit and sporting a crew cut.

But El Salvador was dangerous. Her other adventures seemed so ridiculous compared to her very last one. She went from trying to avoid serious relationships with boys she called dull to dodging bullets in the third world. But how could I question her? When other people asked her, "How can you go to El Salvador?" she answered, "How can you stay home?"

So now when I sleep, I see her feeding the orphans she writes to me about. I hear exotic nighttime music of Trixie and her guitar, singing the children and the countryside to sleep.

Trixie came over the day she decided to leave the country. She still had months to prepare before she would be ready to go, but she acted as if she were ready to fly away tomorrow. We drank hot tea on my patio.

"Claudia, I'm leaving the country in October." She patted the kitten who had found her, and who purred and wove itself around her legs.

The last time I had spoken to Trixie, about two days earlier, she had mentioned that her job was not too interesting and she might buy a motorcycle. Over the years, she had mentioned several times wanting to travel, so that's about all I thought she was talking about: maybe quitting her job, packing up, and taking off. For a moment, I wondered if I would do the same thing. I imagined both of us in Paris. But my practical mind won me back. I didn't have enough money saved up to go travelling, and besides, who would take care of my animals?

"Why now?" I asked her.

"Because I feel empty, Claudia. In my fashionable little apartment downtown, my fashionable little car, my fashionable little clothes—I'm living so alone, Claudia."

"What do you mean, alone, Trixie? I live alone. But I'm not about to close down my home and run out of the country. Is there something besides your being alone?"

"But, Claudia, you have all your animals. They swarm around you, needing you. You feed them and love them and know them all by name. Every day, either another cat or dog wanders right into your life or one of the ones you have already needs this or that from the vet.

"It's different with me, when I say I live alone. I work and make meals for myself. Time passes and I hear it on my clocks. And it's six o'clock, so I make dinner again. There's nothing to it. Between visits with you, I doubt myself and reclaim myself so many times I can't begin to count them, or to explain them to anyone. I'm living this big puzzle, it seems, and the only piece I can figure out is the me being alone piece. That's what I mean about alone."

Tigre, the tiger striped cat, crawled up into my lap. He's the biggest cat I've ever seen. He takes up my entire lap. When I first saw

him, his left eye had been swollen so that I couldn't even see his eyeball, and his skin sagged around his frame, dangling like rags. Now he's plump and lumbers about like a jungle animal. He sat in my lap and purred. "So how will travelling stop you from being alone? Won't you travel alone? And won't I just sit here and miss you while you spend all that time roaming around just to find out that you've taken your loneliness with you?"

Trixie smiled. She leaned forward. A few bangle bracelets slid down her arm and jingled. "No, Claudia. I'm not just travelling. And even if that's all I was up to, I still know I'll always feel empty like this, in this job and car and my—" she picked at her tank top "--clothes."

We both drank more tea, staring into the garden behind my house where a few tiger lilies were blooming and a few of my cats were playing tag with the bees. I remembered how Trixie was my only friend who never said to me, "For God's sake, Claudia, why do you take all these damned animals in?" And she never wagged a finger at me or shook her head knowingly when flea seasons hit and I had to flea-bomb the house about three times every month.

When Trixie sat back again, she said, "I'm going to an orphanage in El Salvador. They need an accountant, and some help taking care of the children." She pulled some photographs out of her purse. "I spoke with some people who do ministry down there. A woman named Sister Blanche gave me these pictures." We leaned toward each other to look. "The people I talked to told me about the countryside there, and the people, and how everyone celebrates Sundays like a festival." At this point she showed me a picture of an enormous crowd of people. I could barely distinguish the men at the fringes holding holy wine and bread among all the bright colors and the musicians and some people who seemed to be dancing. But very clear in the background was a soldier, standing stern-faced and alert, carrying a gun across his

chest.

She filed through the rest of the pictures, about ten of them. One was a dumping area where a dilapidated shack stood; a few of the inhabitants warmed food around a fire outside the curtain which acted as a door. Another picture showed clean green mountainsides. Some showed children playing. One showed a dead body that a priest was administering last rites for. Trixie explained that the Salvadoran soldiers often threatened and killed the people who properly buried the bodies they left behind. I looked up at Trixie. Her face was as smooth and solid as always. I imagined her packing all her belongings, and giving most of them away. And then she would take as little as possible, and her guitar, to El Salvador in October.

October arrived like it always does. I didn't join the others who begged Trixie not to go. I saw how Trixie's eyes had already memorized the faces of the children in the pictures that Sister Blanche had given her. I even wondered again what I would do if it weren't for my house full of animals.

Before Trixie left, she gave me a map of Central America with her city circled and her address penciled in the ocean. I gave her stationery—plenty of it—postage, and pens. I drove with Trixie and her mother to the airport. Trixie's mother cried the whole time. "Trixie, why are you leaving me—so far away?" And every time she calmed herself down, she burst into tears again. "I gave you a good home here, didn't I, Trixie? I didn't make you hate it here so much that you want to run off as soon as you live here by yourself? What do you need from El Salvador?"

Trixie found she needed a lot from El Salvador. She wrote me letters about "my children." She fed them and loved them and knew them all by name. One she called "el tigre" because he was big for his age and he always wanted to sit on her lap. I read that part of her letter and felt relieved that part of me had arrived with her in El Salvador. Something there seemed safe and sound.

Today I walked my newest dog through a street downtown. The dog is wide and short and he waddles. I call him Duck. A little boy was sitting on his front steps when I walked by. He had dark skin and black hair that lifted in the breeze. He was wearing clothes that looked like third-go-round hand-me-downs. He knelt by the dog, stretched out his hand, and he said, "Venga aqui, mio nino." And I remembered El Salvador and Trixie, and I remembered that Trixie was dead. I stood feeling pale and light while the boy stroked Duck's head and spoke Spanish so softly. How quickly the boy loved my dog, a little waddling dog. How many children must have loved Trixie. I wonder, was it one of those children who found her with a bullet in her head and her blood just everywhere? She was visiting one of the priests who buried bodies when the soldiers came.

Trixie's mother called me to tell me. "Honey," she said, "I need you here."

I drove to Trixie's old house, where she lived when we were in high school. We stayed up late together here, watching horror movies and eating popcorn. I turned up Trixie's driveway and I heard a voice saying, "Nothing needs me here, Mom, even though you *want* me here." And Trixie's mom cried more, and managed to say, "Safehome, sweetheart, safehome." Trixie's mom and I hugged Trixie. She go on the plane and flew away. That was more than a year ago.

Before I even hung up the phone with Trixie's mother, I knew Trixie was dead. I'd been reading about El Salvador in the news again, and I'd been reading Trixie's letters.

I walked into Trixie's house. I felt like I could have been sixteen again. I would've been. I would've forgotten all my college degrees, all my jobs, even my pets, if I knew that Trixie and I could stay up all night talking about Clancey McPherson and his makeshift moustache, or about how sometimes in the middle, middle of night we *know* God exists because we feel God pressing in around us like gentle air; and if we wake up afraid, the

fear immediately vanishes.

But I'm not sixteen, and I know it. Trixie isn't here, but I hear her mother downstairs. She's in Trixie's old room. She's sitting on the bed. A few drawers hang open. Some clothes and letters are piled on the desk and the floor.

"She gave me everything she wanted to keep before she left. I want to organize it, Claudia. Can you help me organize it?" Her lower lip quivers and she looks old, the wrinkles on her face are loose. She holds a tissue in one hand. Her eyes are not focused on me. I sit down beside her.

"They found Trixie today. Somebody did," she says in a voice which might have come from deep within a cave. "She was coming home for Christmas, Claudia. She would've been home in two weeks. I haven't seen her, Claudia. She got on that plane and flew away."

We sit on the bed and keep each other company.

Trixie's mom says, "I've known it for a long time, honey, ever since she left. I've felt it every day, and now I can't even cry."

Later, we drink coffee in the kitchen. I see Trixie everywhere: in the tea kettle; we used to drink tea all the time. Trixie put brown sugar in hers. I see her in the window panes over the sink. We had been playing catch with silly putty when it whizzed past Trixie's hands and crashed right through the window. I see her in the map of Central America that Trixie's mother has spread across the refrigerator. magnets shaped like ice cream cones hold it there.

After we finish our coffee and dead noise fills our ears, some of Trixie's other relatives arrive. I shake hands with the ones I don't know, hug the ones I do. I feel some tears along my face. Trixie's mother hugs me close and soft. I smell the perfume that Trixie always bought her. She says, "Thank you, Claudia, thank you," at least twenty times.

"Call me again any time you need anything," I say. Trixie would say how I

always had a good sense for being needed.

"You do the same, Claudia. Please," she says.

And today I hear a song Trixie wrote. She sent me the music and the lyrics. I hear only the little bit that I remember:

When I sleep, I dream of war.
I clench you in my teeth, El Salvador.

Duck sits on my feet while I spread Central America across my table. I find the place where Trixie is, or was, and I read her penciled words in the ocean. I have a map of the whole world that I lay across the first map. I measure the distance in fingertips from my home to El Salvador. I wonder what those children will do without her. El Tigre bumps into me and purrs. There is an "el tigre" in El Salvador.

I hear Trixie ask, "Why do you stay home?" And I wonder if what I am feeling is the "alone" Trixie explained to me.

In the LAUNDROMAT

Traci Wood

She stands before the washer
in the ALL-NIGHT LAUNDROMAT,
weighing out her life
in scoops of heavy-duty detergent
(even though all the children
had long since been grown).

Her plaid skirt and
fur-trimmed cap placed
snugly
on her head betray
her age, relics of that
distant era when
the phone never ceased and
the children
(oh, those children...)
were always underfoot.

They told her not
to come here...to buy
her own washing machine
("one of those little,
portable things...surely
Dad left plenty...")
yet she remained steadfast
in her decision.

She secretly enjoyed
this weekly excursion out
of the monotony of her
mothball-scented life.
She would inquire
of Mr. George's rheumatism and
of Mrs. Clark's ailing cat...
these were her friends.

Like the laundry
she washed
and dried
and folded
they, too, were a
comfort to her.

Together they watch
their outdated clothing
spin frantically
behind glass doors, and
feel their strength
renewed.

August is Dying

Cate Hamilton

August is dying on the streets of a september town, yet the pale
wash of afternoon still clings
to the broken windowpanes of a crumbling warehouse.
A freight train's sudden rumble startles the sparrows into
flight,
yet they rest again upon a flaking billboard advertising
"Jimmy's" and "Coca-Cola: Have a Coke and a Smile."
A "For Sale" sign is almost totally obscured by spiders' webs,
dirt and dust
in the window of a bare-faced brick building.
The stillness of noon's somnolent heat begins to fade as the
evening breeze tickles
faded newspapers in the gutter. Elms arch over abandoned avenues.

Thick-waisted oaks cast long shadows over empty lanes, evening's
tendrils reaching out and across
to darken corroded corrugated roofs of tin into ripples on the
face of a bottomless lake.
Lonely porches slouch sullenly, their boards rotting and warped;
wild ivy clings to a signpost and sighs in the cool night breeze.

The houses' eyes turn inward to other summers, and only
scarred faces of abandoned buildings watch
as August dies on the streets of a september town.

In Colleen Moore's Dollhouse
Maggie Bassen

Upstairs
in the royal suite
Thumbelina rests her heady swirl of golden hair--
gossamer lashes kiss gently
cheeks of marble, soothed with rose.

Tiny, dainty hands of eggshell
stroke the gauzy coverlet,
upon which a spider has spun the finest lace
and spangled it with crystals of dew.

Gently
the bed rocks--
a golden cradle--
in the sweet rhythm of breath.
Somewhere, downstairs
the filaments of the harp
faintly stir
while the moon washes over the delicate splendor of the room.

The chairs sparkle
brilliant--
they are really a pair of platinum and emerald earrings.
The books so tiny on the library shelves
are miniature handwritten volumes
by famous authors, poets--
every star's autograph graces some page,
written with a pinpoint.
Flea-sized tesserae shimmer in the perfect mosaics
that deck the walls and ceilings--
depicting fairy lands
which share in the opulence
of the spectacular miniature castle.

Ripe

Jeffrey S. Bardzell

"the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably,
the most poetical topic in the world."

-E. A. Poe

Ed went to Al's mansion.
They got hungry, so they went out to eat.
But they got side-tracked
by a hideous white Bengal tiger
jumping out of the black trees
tipping their canoe into the rushing water.
They swiftly swam with the stream
until they came to a swirling eddy
within a thick wet jungle blanket of air.
When they climbed onto the twisty ebony roots
they found a slightly decayed corpse of
a black-haired woman, her meek smile locked
in death. Still out of breath from their adventure,
Ed and Al cried and cried:
she was so unquestionably lovely.

Stumbling through the woods they came across
several slight bodies laying nude in the fallen leaves
and beautifully tangled in the muck,
some more decayed than others;
the left half of one woman's face had been
gnawed off by some scavengers,
perhaps the red ants crawling in and out
of the mouth and the right nostril.
Allen mentioned that he wished he had a palette
while Ed sat down and tried to carve a poem
in the rough bark of a tree with his red pocket knife.

As the late morning sun topped the trees,
Al saw a revealing shaft of light lifting to the left.
Following it, tripping through the prickers,
they came into a clearing with soft grass
bent with slowly drying dew, sodden beneath.
But the middle of this sun-soaked clearing had a
topic that any artist in the world would kill to see:
a thirty-foot pile of rotting bodies
jumbled upon each other
like so many roots tumbling into the river.
The young men were muted;
tickled with goosebumps they could only

collapse with laughter at such a scene,
a scene so overwhelming in its aesthetic splendor.
Allen went so far as to kiss gently the grey lips
of each exposed feminine head near the bottom of the pile.
Edgar took a telltale lock of hair from
one of the grey heads, an inch of skin binding the roots.
On the way back from the restaurant
he stopped at the store and had it laminated.

Storyteller
Diana Daniel

"Yes, now I've met me another spinner of strange and
gauzy threads . . ."

-Suzanne Vega

He stirs yarn skeins with his china-blue eyes.
Long fingers are tangled in
blueyellowgreenred fuzzy wool.
"What color'll soothe your soul tonight?"
The perfect shade is threaded through my ear.

Storytelling.
His tongue tastes the edges of the strawberry words,
choosing just the ripe ones.
Goldfish dance the story
on an iris stage,
with eyelash curtains.
Sculptor's hands marbleize characters
in the moon sun star light.

My story follows me home.
I make it a bed
of leaves, flowers and snowflakes
and put it in a drawer
with the starfish.

A Portrait of Li-Chin's Jade Tree
Joseph Michael Romero

Tepid light
Cuts the rice paper temple
Into diagonals,
Feeding Li-Chin's Jade tree.
The tree sits
Like the old man would--
Legs clasp beneath him
Easily,
Like folded hands;
His arthritic trunk
Salaams to poise
His dumb eyes and face
Over the steaming kettle
Of water and leaves.
The petals are proud,
As artificial limbs
Which awkwardly
Grasp the light.

Now
Each molecule of air
Is an ink point of white,
Suspended in time
As if held by a string

Except

Where the lines
Thread the steam,
Casting
Complementary
Shadows on the floor.

Halting Speedy Edie

Tracey Daniels

I remember driving up to the house in our beige Pontiac station wagon. The house looked like any other one-story brick number on the street, but I don't think a woman like this lived inside every one of those houses.

The wood-framed screen door was crooked enough so that it sat an inch or so open. If I hadn't been afraid of catching Speedy Edie doing something I didn't want to see her doing, I should have just opened the door and gone on in. But each Tuesday afternoon I went through the ritual of knocking--bang, bang, bang on the loose screen door--and hearing her hoarse, strained, sweetly witchy voice invite me in.

She usually met me in the hallway, but occasionally she was still sitting at the piano with another student. If the latter were the case, she would tell me to wait in the family room until she and the other student were finished. I sometimes acted like I couldn't hear her and stepped into the piano room to catch a glimpse of her with another student. "Oh, you said you want me to wait in the family room? Oh, okay." And I'd take in all I could of the other student's emotional state, to see if they were my comrade in fear. What worried me most was that maybe everyone else who took piano lessons from Speedy Edie actually liked her.

It wasn't that I hated Speedy. It was just that I never was fond of her. She always tapped the wood part of the piano with a number two pencil that was as sharp as a syringe needle. When I made a mistake, her pencil-armed hand jerked toward my empty one and then quickly back to the wood part of the piano, like it had never left. I always cringed at the thought that one day Speedy's conscience might fail to control her and my blood would be dripping on the ivories.

I also didn't like that she didn't let me play from my *Ten Top 40 Love Songs Made Easy* book, which I had saved my allowance for

weeks to buy. There was one Barry Manilow number in it that I had been practicing at home after picking up the tempo from the radio, and I wanted to play it for her. I thought I really had rhythm, but she wanted me to count out the beat and learn the tempo that way. We usually ended up arguing mildly over "letting the music flow" or "doing it the correct way." Speedy thought I would flow all over the piano or something, so she generally avoided the whole situation by keeping me in my little orange trainer book until one minute before the half hour was up. At that point, she would ask me if I'd been working on my Barry Manilow number and if I'd like to play it for her. As soon as I'd start, she'd look at her watch and say, "Oh, my gracious, it's almost time for the other student to get here. You'd better get your books together and wait for your mom."

So I'd sit anxiously on my knees on the antique sofa next to the window, peering between the curtains for a beige Pontiac station wagon. I wanted to get out of there because I kept noticing how Speedy's living room looked just like a funeral parlor. Cold, pure, pale blue carpet was on the floor, and long antique sofas that looked like benches lined the walls. The room was narrow and long, and the piano waited like a casket at the far end.

Speedy herself looked a little like Grandpa from the Munsters: feminine and pale, with bleached steel wool hair. She wore glasses that were stark black and pointy, only her points always seemed to have more of a spike than other glasses like that did. I called her Speedy Edie because her name was Edilia, and her head shook in a perpetual nod, like she was always in a hurry.

When I was sitting on that antique couch waiting for my mother, I usually jumped at the first engine noise I heard. One time, I saw a beige station wagon go by and went running outside, only to find that it was the neighbors'. I didn't dare go back inside, though. I had made it that far, and Speedy would never know the difference.

Another time, probably the most important day of my life, the other student's mother got there before my mother did.

I recognized the long blue station wagon as being from my church. Out of the car came Susie Colby, with her piano books in a lazy stack in her arms. As she padded her way to the porch, her blonde ponytail swung wearily, like an elephant's trunk. I opened the crooked front door for her.

"Mimi, what are you doing here?" she asked, in shock that other children got dropped off at Speedy Edie's, too.

"I'm always here on Tuesday afternoons. I have piano lessons with Mrs. Smith. What are you doing here?"

"I have piano lessons, too," she stated.

"Well, how come I've never seen you before?"

"Oh, that's because I usually go on Wednesdays. My mom had a dentist appointment Wednesday, so I had to come today."

We looked at each other with forced smiles on our faces and said, "See ya later." Then I left her and waited by the front curb for my mom. When she arrived and I got into the car, I told my mom that Susie Colby took piano lessons from Mrs. Smith, too, and that she didn't look very happy.

"I'm sure she's just tired," my mom said. "Mrs. Smith will cheer her up," she assured me.

I sat there, and as my mom pulled away from the curb, I wondered what kind of fool she was to think that Mrs. Smith would actually put someone in a better mood.

"Did you know Kathy Colby takes lessons from her, too?"

I shook my head.

"Almost all the children from your Sunday school class take piano lessons from Mrs. Smith. The Guss boys, the Fowlers."

I couldn't believe it. It figured, though, since Speedy Edie was our church organist. She could do all her recruiting on Sundays. I could just see her sliding her bench neatly

under the organ and carefully making her way across the sanctuary carpet, one pointed black shoe in front of the other, until she reached a parent with a child in the Intermediate Sunday School Class.

"Deirdre," she would say, "how nice to see you. I couldn't help but notice, when I stood up for that last hymn, how active Burke looks. It's just amazing how fast they grow up, isn't it?"

Deirdre would nod.

"You know, I just thought you might like to know that piano lessons often help a child to learn to channel that excess energy and learn discipline. If you're interested, we could start him on piano lessons sometime this month. I have several openings."

Deirdre would think it an ingenious idea, and without Burke's consent, would agree to begin dropping him off at her house for one half hour every week.

That must be her system. I remember mom saying once how Mrs. Smith said that I was an extremely independent child, and piano lessons might give me a way of exercising my independence, because I'd be on my own to practice and learn. I wondered what day I had been plucked from the sanctuary, and what hymn had been playing when Mrs. Smith noticed my "independent nature."

The more I thought about it, the more I couldn't believe Mrs. Smith, and I couldn't believe the parents. All I wanted was to go to Sunday school and talk to other students to find out if Mrs. Smith almost made their fingers bleed and if she let them play the songs they wanted to play.

"Mom, can we go to Sunday school before Sunday?" I asked eagerly.

She was, of course, shocked that I wanted to go at all, much less that I wanted to go before it was time.

"Well, you can't go to Sunday school class yet, but there's a potluck dinner at church tomorrow night. Your father and I are going, and we planned for you to come with us."

"Do you think anybody from my Sun-

day school class will be there?"

"Of course. They always are, dear."

"Good."

My mom smiled and continued driving through town. I sat in the front seat, with the big seatbelt draping over my tiny body, wondering what the Colby and Guss kids would say about Speedy Edie.

Wednesday evening came, and we found ourselves in the fellowship hall of Appleton United Church. As I scooped casserole and meatballs onto my plate, I looked around for other students of Speedy Edie. I spotted Cara Fowler with Kathy Colby and Ed Guss at the third table. Being independent, I trotted over to their table and sat down.

We said our awkward "hellos," and ate our food silently for a moment or two. Then I got down to business.

"So, Kathy, Ed, Cara, you guys, uh, take piano lessons from Mrs. Smith, I hear."

"Yeah," Ed sighed. "It's okay. It's supposed to make me walk less awkwardly."

Cara's eyes opened wide. "You take from Speedy Edie?" Apparently I wasn't the only one who had noticed Mrs. Smith's hurried nature. Cara picked up her fork and acted like she was going to beat Kathy's hand with it. "This is what she does to me when I mess up, only she uses this really sharp pencil. One time she hit my arm and almost sliced my mole off with the tip." She pointed to the very tender looking, small brown growth on her arm. "See?"

We were fascinated. I told them that Speedy never let me play my love songs from the book I bought. Kathy, who had been silent, suddenly spoke. As she did, her face turned white.

"That's nothin'. The things she's done to me... I wish she was dead."

We all laughed at the pleasant thought of never having to leave climbing a tree or roller skating in the street to sit at Speedy's bench in the afternoon. I thought of my church friends who weren't taking lessons from her never having to hear that they had been signed

up for some sort of music and reform program.

"Look at her up there," Kathy said. Speedy was sitting at the piano by the stage, already having taken her position for the after-meal sing along. Her styrofoam plate, loaded with food, was resting on the bench next to her. She was devouring a fried chicken wing and little pieces of crunchy skin were being scattered around us as she ripped the meat off the bones with her teeth.

We shuddered, and Kathy continued her story. "She makes me cry almost every week. Whenever I play, she tells me I'm careless and makes me keep doing the song until I get it right. Of course I never get it right because I'm too nervous. I've been playing 'Ding Dong Bell' for a month now."

I shook my head, and thought about how Speedy had played "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," the Easter anthem, at the Christmas potluck a few months ago. She had gotten confused about what songs to play on what holidays. It was a foolish mistake, but no one said anything, for fear of hurting her feelings. She was loved and may not be around much longer.

Sitting there at that potluck dinner, I wondered what would happen to Speedy if someone were to hurt her, just how much damage she could take, and what she would need to help her kick the bucket a little sooner.

As we ate more, I got more curious. I thought Kathy might be interested, so I told her to come to the bathroom with me. She was more than interested; she had already wondered the same thing herself. Since the two of us had thought the same thing, we knew it was a good idea. So, we decided to invite Cara and Ed to help us kill Speedy Edie.

We walked back to our table trying to look as normal as usual. I kept hearing Kathy behind me saying, "Don't smile, don't smile." When we sat down, she immediately asked the other two if they could keep a secret and, if so, did they want to do something really important with us. Cara nodded excitedly,

and Ed, never one to show much emotion, said, "Yeah, sure." I said Kathy and me were in charge, because we thought of it. They agreed, and followed us to the trash cans to dump our styrofoam plates. Then we walked as casually as possible to the hallway, and stood in the small corridor next to the Coke machine.

"Okay," I said, as sneakily and officially as I knew how. "We're going to end piano lessons once and for all. We're going to incapacitate Speedy Edie."

Cara gleamed. "You mean, break her fingers?"

"No. We're going to end her. Do her in," I whispered.

"Kill?" said Ed.

"Poison," I said.

"Poison?" said Ed. "That's a very good idea. I have a chemistry set at home."

At this point, Cara backed out from the corridor and headed back into the fellowship hall.

"Cara, get back here," I snapped.

"No way!" she said. "Don't you learn anything from Sunday school?" She came closer. "Thou shalt not kill!"

She stepped toward us, and I explained to her that she wouldn't have to do it all by herself, that since there were four of us, she only had to do one fourth of the job. Having only to contribute was very inviting to her. Nobody ever said anything about committing one fourth of a murder.

"Are you in?" I asked.

She twisted her bottom lip around with her front teeth, then looked wide-eyed at me and said, "Okay! But, you have to promise that I'm only—wait, how much percent is a fourth?"

"Twenty-five," Kathy offered. "We learned percents the other day in school."

"Yes, don't worry. We're all only twenty-five percent of this thing," I told her.

"But we're killing all of Speedy Edie. That's one hundred percent. One hundred percent of Speedy Edie will be dead." Kathy

giggled, proud of herself.

Ed's face turned a little grey. "Um, I'd prefer that you not say 'dead' around me. That tuna casserole didn't really sit too good, if you know what I mean."

"What are you, some kind of sissy?" Kathy made a fist like she was going to punch his bloated little stomach.

"Hey!" I shouted. "We're drawing attention to ourselves. Stop it, or we call the whole thing off."

We all looked at each other apologetically. I motioned for us to smush together to make plans.

"Okay, if anyone has ideas, you call me or Kathy, but preferably not when our parents are home." Just then we heard the beginning of "Onward Christian Soldiers" being pounded out on the piano. "Shoot, it's time for the sing along. Before we go, does anyone know what Speedy Edie likes to eat?"

Ed spoke. "She likes fish. My family saw her at the church fish fest last month."

"No, we can't poison her fish. Something convenient, that we can bring her."

"How 'bout brownies? Everybody loves brownies," said Cara. "Okay, brownies it is. Remember, any ideas, call me or Kathy—this week. We gotta do this soon, before the recital."

"We're gonna miss the recital?" Cara moaned. "Can't we wait 'til after the recital?"

"For gosh sakes, no! C'mon, let's go."

We stepped out from our hiding place, one by one, so as not to look suspicious. We sat down with our parents this time, since they hadn't seen us all evening and might think we were up to something.

Everyone was singing. Strained, off-key voices, and Speedy Edie's plucking, formed a cloud of cacophony in the room. The choir members, scattered about the room, sang loudly to try and counteract it. I was leaning back in my chair, mouthing the words, when Ed walked up to Kathy.

I immediately sat up straight in my seat to monitor their activities. Ed whispered

something in Kathy's ear. Kathy's mother tapped her on the shoulder and shook her finger at Ed. He handed Kathy a napkin and took off. She held the napkin curiously, questioning him with her eyes, and then started to wipe her nose with it. Ed, back in his seat, jumped up and shouted, "No! Read it!" Kathy's mother chuckled, probably thinking that Ed had just slipped Kathy a love note. I found out later that the napkin said, "Arsenic in ground apple seed should do the trick."

I couldn't believe Ed's stupidity in being so casual about that important napkin, but I reprimanded him and it was done with. I burned the napkin in my backyard and scattered the ashes, so no one would ever read the note.

Thursday afternoon, I got a call from Cara. She had the brilliant idea to make brownies in Sunday school class, since we baked something once a month and next Sunday was our day to bake.

I called Kathy and told her about Cara's plan. "It's perfect," she said. "Who's going to suspect us? And besides, it's like having automatic forgiveness, doing it there." She was to call Ed, and tell him to bring the ground apple seeds to Sunday school.

I was to bring the brownie mix, and the teacher, Mrs. Ogleby, would have the eggs and milk, like she always did when we baked.

Sunday morning came, and I sprang out of bed like a jack-in-the-box. I remembered not to reveal my enthusiasm to my parents. Surely they would have been suspicious if I were anything more than rock-heavy reluctant to go to church.

I saw Kathy as I was walking in. We went into the Sunday school room together, noticing all the baking goodies Mrs. Ogleby had laid out on the table. Ed and Cara came in. We began to mix. As we poured and stirred, we smiled. Ed patted his pocket and we knew that he had the poison. All we needed was to be alone.

Cara offered to take our pan and put it in the oven, so the oven wouldn't be crowded

with everyone's pans at the same time.

"How nice, Carmen," said Mrs. Ogleby. She pondered it a minute. "Yes, dear, why don't you. That would be fine. You know where the kitchen is, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Cara.

I offered to help her, and so did Ed, and so did Kathy.

"Do you really need that many people to put a pan in the oven?"

We nodded.

"Okay, but only if you're quiet."

We assured her that we would be as quiet as a snake.

When we got into the kitchen, Cara said she'd stay at the door to make sure no one caught us. The other three of us went to the corner of the room. Ed pulled out a baggie full of crushed apple seeds. He had ground them so fine that they looked smaller than sand.

"Nice job, Ed," I told him.

"Thanks. I used a sledge hammer."

Kathy grabbed a spoon from the drawer and, as Ed sprinkled the seeds onto the dark brown dough, she stirred it, burying the poison. We put the tray in the oven, and within five minutes, clouds of warm chocolate smell, with the slight tinge of apple, filled the church hallway. We could smell the brownies as we sat in the classroom with Mrs. Ogleby. She commented about their unusually good smell, and we thanked her and smiled at one another.

When the brownies were done, we rushed into the kitchen, praying that no one else would get there before us and eat them, or somehow prevent us from giving them to Speedy Edie. We let them cool and then cut them into four pieces. Each of us got a brownie and we were to administer it to Speedy Edie during our piano lesson.

As we were wrapping them securely in saran wrap, to preserve them until our individual lessons, Mrs. Ogleby stepped into the kitchen.

"Just wanted to see how they came out." She leaned down and sniffed the saran

wrap-covered brownies. "Mmmmm. Wish I could have one." Our eyes darted frantically around. "But I'm on a weight program, and a brownie probably wouldn't be the best thing for me right now, would it?" she continued, heading toward the door.

"No, m'am," Cara said.

Mrs. Ogleby looked back at us and said, "You will remember to share, won't you? Today we're all going to swap our goodies so that we can learn the value of someone else's work."

How could this happen? Poisoning a fellow student would be even worse than poisoning Mrs. Ogleby.

Kathy was so smart, though. She suddenly started pouting. "But I don't like any kind of sweets other than brownies. That means I won't get anything to eat...unless you swap with me, Cara."

Cara, of course, agreed, and then Ed and I swapped, under the pretense that he thought I was pretty. Mrs. Ogleby was satisfied, even excited by the budding romance in her class, and we were safe, securely ready to take care of Speedy Edie. On to the sanctuary we went, with our saran-wrapped brownies tucked in our pockets, to sit through what may have been the longest church service ever.

Ed's piano lesson was Monday at 3:00, and Cara's was at 4:00. By Cara's, we figured the arsenic would have affected her, if not killed her. I called Cara at 4:45 to find out, but she said Speedy was nodding like she always did, and still beating her fingers with fervor.

Tuesday, Kathy went at 3:00, and then, at 3:45, my mom drove me across town to her house. I walked up to her front door, with my brownie nearly smushed between my chest and piano books. My hands were sweating rain drops, but I knew that I had to give Speedy Edie the last brownie.

I knocked. Speedy said "Come in," with a voice more strained than I'd ever heard before. She was sitting on her bench, but there wasn't another student there with her. She

told me that she was deathly tired, and asked if I would just play through all my songs, including my love songs, for her to listen to.

I hesitated, then said, "Okay." I put some of my books on the floor, with the brownie resting on top of them. She noticed it and asked if I had brought a brownie for any special reason. "Well, I brought it for you, Mrs. Smith. We made them in Sunday school the other day."

I handed it to her and sat down on the bench and played. Above the music I heard her short, heavy breaths. Her presence had the weight of God and a dead body combined, and I looked at her head nodding more nervously than it ever had before, and I couldn't take it anymore.

I pushed the bench back, jumped up, grabbed my books and the brownie and nearly spit my words, "Mrs. Smith, I have to go."

"Now, now," she said. "You just got here."

"I know, but I feel sick, and I'm afraid I might throw up on your piano. You really don't want this brownie, I think we burned them when we made them at Sunday school. I have to go. Goodbye."

From what I could see of Mrs. Smith, she was confused by my rush. But she didn't try to stop me.

I threw open the screen door and ran like I was running for my life. I ran to the 7-11 around the corner and stuffed my piano books and the brownie in the trash. I called my mom and told her that I left piano lessons because I was sick. I also told her that I never wanted to take piano lessons again in my life.

Rows of Stone
Jeffrey S. Bardzell

My back aches from bending into this
tabloid pressing black paper up flush against it,
and I sit back and lay the broad silver crayon on the turf.
Yes crows, I hear your screams.

I see a flicker beneath a withered oak and wonder
Who are you fey figure
that glides through these rows of rough grey granite
on this cool night?
Do you understand the urgent whisper of the breeze?
Is it singing to the equinox
on this the first eve of the new season?
I fold into your long, sinuous arms
and marvel at my own consumption;
is this how it felt
before the breaking of the androgynie?
Resting on my back I smell your sweet apple breath.
The crescent's blue light on the top
of your red hair gently teases me.
The flat stone beneath me
chills the underside of my thigh.
Eclipsing the sounds of the stream nearby
I hear the rustle of wings and see
the bats beating black against the moon.

Now when you're gone I wonder
who H. T. Miller was and why he died at such a young age.
I pack up my crayon and the silver-blue print
of the prayer I reproduced from his dying stone.

Laparoscopy
Julie Antolick

He pirces the thin tender tension,
entering the precious cache
where she hoards her secret jewels,
the thousands, the half-dreams;
he plucks the swollen ones
and they sail through the needle,
invisible in their rosy fluid cloak:
all this while she sleeps,
immersed in a sleepy world
of fluffy white and soft light,
of slow, tinkling lullabies
amid wet gurglings
of a benign dictator.

Remnant
Bryan Higgins

The bus stop squats
in the sickly yellow light
of an argon bulb,
its worn beetle-brown benches
waiting for the occasional transient traveller,
its streaky windows
opaque with diesel dust.
An incessant crackling hum sounds
from the light,
sheltered in its steel vandal-proof cage,
a constant fly buzz seeming to come
from the horde of insects clustered on the walls.
The bench holds
a crumpled grey corduroy shirt,
a husk left by a midnight departure.
In the breast pocket are
half a pack of Marlboro reds
and a dollar bill with a phone number
scrawled across George Washington's forehead.

Horseshoe Afternoon

CoryAnne Harrigan

My wrinkled uncles clank their horseshoes
in their grips.
They glare at rusted stakes
that stand rigid
above the long, bending grass.
Horseshoes for money is serious.

Those two old giants
have their sparse hair
slicked far back from their brows.
They give grave stares
to the bent iron bands
weighing down their palms.
One booms, "We'll start over here."

They squint to judge distance,
rub the iron to gauge its weight.
Slow underhand tosses
glide upward, suspended.
Each pitch turns
for the perfect one-and-three-quarter
mid-air rotation.

Those men frown at ringers
and leer at the close shots.
But when they stop to score
they grin and shake hands.
And after,
they wink at me,
go for their bottled beers,
sit on the porch,
talk about the weather.

I come for the show
on slow afternoons.

The Battle with the P'o-L'u: Five Poems
Mara Sawtelle

I. You, the P'o-L'u

What is this talk of a "seductress"?
For a time, I was willing to listen to your
false promises of comfort, security.
(But what kind of safety does entrapment
provide?)
I fled, lest my white limbs be sucked
into Stygian depths of hidden mania,
an inky grasp of voracious possession.
I will never yield me.
Am I indeed to be faulted
that I did not consent to be
captured, held, slain
in the livid fury of your craving?
I am no seductress.
You hold your own doom within you--
the unmastered madness of coveted
conquest
will drag you to the mire of your own
making.

II. Death

See what this has done to me, this battle--
it is now a conscious effort
to reach beyond the shattered shells
for warmth, for light, merely to live.
I lie crumpled (like a tattered handkerchief
or the withered embryo of a smashed, half-
formed egg)
accepting exhausted the blows and blessings
of nature
covering me like dead leaves
all things alike.
Here upon this blasted plain of war
I suppose that I will eventually decompose
no longer be cognizant
an ignorant part of the indifferent earth
I will reach greenly upward.
I am too tired now even to sleep.
The spectres and wraiths of my terror, my
 pain
rush gibbering through the chasms of my

waking dreams.

III. Hades

The jabbering ghost of that other intruder--
it lives yet in the Hades of my soul.
My unsought wounds still fester:
the whitely swelling scars show through
the tattered garment I have clutched around
 me
to hide the ruin he made.

Do not turn away, Beloved;
your burning gaze heals, cauterizes,
stops the infectuous hate from spreading,
gangrenous, too near my heart.
Restore me! I will not remain
a hidden cripple within a web of tissue
 scars
(for that would mean his victory).
Help me to open up these tight-curled
 fingers
and offer up this bitter trove of hatred.

IV. Resurrection

The trees slowly divest themselves of their
festal garments--
teardrops, one leaf at a time,
gaining a more ascetic appearance for
the Lenten season, penitential winter.
I turn within myself, outward brightness
banished for another day,
and wait for the layers of snow and the ice
to stiffen around this exterior shell.
I reach for strength, down, deeply:
face the darkness within the earth
(so easy to ignore in summer's gaiety and
 laughter)
and rest there.
Darkness is a mother--
an essential answer to pain,
and if the wounded cannot live there,
where else is there to go?
Rest, my heart, within winter's darkness,

rest and weep, gather yourself
in blessed silence, think upon
the hope that comes through sacrifice
to break the skin again with budding leaves
and branches reaching out to greet the sun.

V. Rebirth

In a different world I flew, a white bird,
crying fierce and free, but hunted,
beyond the clutch of that cruel beast
P'o-L'u, whose tentacled grasp and beakish mouth
desired only to maul and tear my soul.
But now
I find myself stooping yet again to rest
on the hand of a man.

You call my name, not hoping to possess;
in freedom I speed my limping wings
where power and greed and conquest cannot go
and shall not hold this bright and soaring bird.
I shall not be devoured.

Ripping Jack's Night

David M. Sniggi

She escaped me tonight.

With heels clattering against the cobblestones
and furiously swishing skirts
she fled into the London darkness,
swallowed by the gripping folds of night.

I turn away and become a spectral shape
slipping through the silent streets,
more a presence than a person,
sifting through the blind alleyways and hidden cul de sacs
for the one.

She escaped me tonight.

I drew her body close
to gaze into her bright eyes
and feel her frail frame tensed,
her trembling lips seeking silent words of redemption.
The sublime smell of fear mixed
with her perfume of jasmine and laughter,
her smeared rouge imperfectly covering
the paleness of her face.
She twisted in my arms,
slipping from my grasp,
flying down the dark street
through the flickering circle shed by a streetlamp,
a terrified angel in white lace,
vanishing.

I held her for that moment,

a thin trembling dove in my hands,
and then she was gone.

I can still feel her embrace,
the press of her body against mine,
her absence only made bearable by the knowledge
that I will soon hold another.

I turn away and cut through the cloak of night
as it closes in around me.

N O C T U R N E

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